

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 EA-07 ISO-00 NEAE-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00

USIE-00 INRE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07

L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 AID-05

PC-01 IO-13 DHA-02 /090 W

-----191959Z 101496 /54-43

O R 191320Z JAN 77

FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0686

INFO AMEMBASSY COLOMBO

AMEMBASSY DACCA

AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMCONSUL BOMBAY

AMCONSUL CALCUTTA

AMCONSUL MADRAS

USLO PEKING

CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L NEW DELHI 907

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (OMISSION PARA 5 AND 6)

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, IN

SUBJECT: FURTHER THOUGHTS ON THE "SNAP POLL"

REFS: A. NEW DELHI 773, B. NEW DELHI 848 (NOTAL), C. NEW
DELHI 906

1. A MINISTER OF STATE WHO WAS PRESENT AT YESTERDAY'S LATE
AFTERNOON CABINET MEETING (AT WHICH THE PM INFORMED HER
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MINISTERS OF HER DECISION FOR ELECTIONS) TOLD ONE OF OUR
DIPLOMATIC COLLEAGUES THAT MRS. GANDHI HAD TOLD THE CABINET
FLATLY THAT HER REASON FOR HOLDING ELECTIONS NOW WAS THAT
IT WOULD BE POLITICALLY MORE DIFFICULT FOR CONGRESS TO WIN
IF ELECTIONS WERE DELAYED UNTIL LATER THIS YEAR.

2. THIS IS THE ONLY SOLID INDICATION WE HAVE RECEIVED SO

FAR FROM A PARTICIPANT IN THE CABINET MEETING OF MRS. GANDHI'S THINKING ON THE SUBJECT. IN ADDITION, BASED ON OUR INITIAL CONTACTS WITH MP'S, POLITICIANS AND JOURNALISTS YESTERDAY AND TODAY, WE OFFER OTHER POSSIBLE CONSIDERATIONS THAT MAY HAVE HELPED EDGE THE PM TOWARD GOING FOR A "SNAP POLL":

(A) BY RELEASING OPPOSITION LEADERS AT THE LAST MINUTE SHE HAD CAUGHT THEM OFF GUARD AND UNPREPARED TO CONTEST THE POLL. THEY WILL NOW BE FORCED INTO A HASTY ATTEMPT TO FORGE A UNITED PARTY OR UNITED FRONT, AND IN THE SHORT SPACE OF TIME ALLOWED UNTIL THE ELECTIONS THEY ARE LIKELY TO EXERT MOST OF THEIR ENERGIES TRYING TO AGREE UPON A SINGLY JOINT CANDIDATE FOR EACH CONSTITUENCY. THE ELEVENTH-HOUR RELEASE OF MORARJI DESAI WAS CAREFULLY CALCULATED SINCE HIS ABRASIVE MANNER MAY NOW FURTHER COMPLICATE THE OPPOSITION'S EFFORTS TO PRESENT A UNITED FRONT TO THE CONGRESS.

(B) THE SUCCESS OF HER ATTACK ON THE CPI ALSO MAY HAVE BEEN A MAJOR FACTOR. THE COMMUNISTS WERE NOW HUMBLLED AND THEIR POSITION HAD BECOME SO WEAKENED THAT THEY WERE IN NO POSITION TO DEMAND THEIR FAIR SHARE OF "TICKETS" FOR LOK SABHA SEATS.

(C) ONE SENIOR CONGRESS MP MAINTAINED THAT MRS. GANDHI DEFINITELY WAS CONCERNED ABOUT HER IMAGE IN THE WEST. ACCORDING TO HIM, SHE HOPED THAT THE HOLDING OF ELECTIONS WOULD HAVE A FAVORABLE IMPACT ON THE WESTERN DEMOCRACIES AND ON INTERNATIONAL LENDING BODIES AND THAT THESE WOULD CONSEQUENTLY BE MORE INCLINED TO EXTEND ECONOMIC COOPERATION AND ASSISTANCE.

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(D) ANOTHER SENIOR CONGRESS MP SUGGESTED THAT BHUTTO'S ANNOUNCEMENT OF ELECTIONS IN PAKISTAN FOR MARCH 7 HAD BEEN THE FINAL STRAW THAT TIPPED THE SCALES, SINCE MRS. GANDHI COULD NOT BEAR TO SEE BHUTTO STEALING A MARCH ON HER AS FAR AS DEMOCRATIC NORMS ARE CONCERNED. OTHER MP SOURCES, HOWEVER, TEND TO DISCOUNT THIS AS A FACTOR.

3. SEVERAL CONTACTS HAVE POINTED OUT THREE KEY ACTIONS WHICH THE GOI HAS TAKEN IN THE PAST FEW DAYS WHICH ACTED TO PAVE THE WAY FOR ANNOUNCING ELECTIONS IN THAT THEY WILL BE FAVORABLY RECEIVED BY IMPORTANT VOTING BLOCS:

(A) THE EXTENSION OF THE TERM OF MILITARY SERVICE FOR OFFICERS AND NONCOMS. MEMBERS OF THE ARMED FORCES ARE ALL VOTERS, WHO IN THE PAST WERE USUALLY RELIABLE SUPPORTERS OF CONGRESS CANDIDATES. THE EXTENSION OF THEIR SERVICE IS A WELCOME MOVE SINCE IT WILL ALLOW THEM TO RETIRE LATER, EARN MORE MONEY OVER THE LONG RUN AND EVENTUALLY RECEIVE

HIGHER PENSIONS.

(B) THE GOI'S DECISION (ANNOUNCED JAN. 17) TO PROCURE EDIBLE OILS FROM FOREIGN SOURCES WILL HAVE A FAVORABLE IMPACT ON CONSUMERS IN THAT IT WILL TEND TO BRING PRICES DOWN. EDIBLE OILS HAD BEEN ONE OF THE FOOD COMMODITIES WHOSE PRICE HAS RISEN THE SHARPEST IN RECENT MONTHS.

(C) THE LIBERALIZATION OF THE BONUS LAW (ALSO ANNOUNCED JAN. 17) WILL BE WIDELY GREETED BY WORKERS. THE GOI'S DECISION MEANS THAT COMPANIES WHICH MAKE A NET PROFIT HAVE TO PAY THEIR EMPLOYEES A MINIMUM BONUS OF RS. 100 EVEN IF THEY DO NOT HAVE SURPLUS FUNDS ON HAND AVAILABLE FOR ALLOCATION.

4. THERE IS WIDESPREAD ASSUMPTION THAT SANJAY GANDHI WILL RUN FOR A LOK SABHA SEAT, PROBABLY FROM SULTANPUR DISTRICT
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WHICH ADJOINS HIS MOTHER'S RAE BARELLI CONSTITUENCY IN U.P. IN FACT, CONGRESSMEN WITH WHOM WE HAVE TALKED THINK THAT SANJAY HAS NO CHOICE BUT TO CONTEST THE ELECTIONS ON HIS OWN IF HE IS TO KEEP UP THE MOMENTUM OF HIS RISING STAR.

5. AS FOR TIMING OF THE LECTION, MRS. GANDHI MERELY SAID THAT IT WOULD OCCUR IN MARCH. SEVERAL NEWSPAPERS AND ALMOST ALL OF OUR POLITICAL CONTACTS PREDICT THAT THE POLL WILL TAKE PLACE SOMETIME DURING THE WEEK OF MARCH 13-19, WITH MARCH 16 BEING OFFERED BY OUR MORE RELIABLE SOURCES. TICKETS FOR LOK SABHA SEATS WILL PROBABLY NOT BE GIVEN OUT UNTIL MID-FEBRUARY, ACCORDING TO WHAT WE HAVE HEARD. THIS WILL KEEP THE OPPOSITION GUESSING FOR THE NEXT SEVERAL WEEKS AS TO THE IDENTITIES OF THE CONGRESSMEN WHOM THEY MUST CONFRONT IN EACH DISTRICT, AND THUS KEEP THEM OFF-BALANCE AS THEY HASTILY TRY TO FORGE A UNITED FRONT. ALSO THIS DELAY IN HANDING OUT CONGRESS TICKETS WILL GIVE THOSE CONGRESSMEN WHO ARE DENIED SEATS VERY LITTLE TIME TO SABOTAGE THE PARTY'S EFFORTS. THEY WILL LIKELY BE DISGRUNTLED BUT BY THEN IT WILL BE TOO LATE TO TRY TO SALVAGE THEIR POSITIONS BY BOLTING TO ANOTHER PARTY. ALLOCATION OF SEATS IN ALL EVENTS WILL BE A DIFFICULT AND SENSITIVE TASK IN MANY IF NOT ALL STATES, BUT PARTICULARLY IN AREAS SUCH AS WEST BENGAL, KERALA, U.P., AND BIHAR.

6. WE HAVE LEARNED, INCIDENTALLY, THAT IN THE LAST WEEK ALONE 200 OF THE 730 MISA DETAINEES IN THE DELHI TIHAR JAIL HAVE BEEN RELEASED. IF A SIMILAR PATTERN IS BEING FOLLOWED ELSEWHERE IN THE COUNTRY, THE NUMBER OF MISA DETAINEES IS CLEARLY DROPPING PRECIPITOUSLY AS THE PM HAS BEEN ANTICIPATING HER JAN. 18 ANNOUNCEMENT.

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Message Attributes

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